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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001407

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS AND INR/B

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/10/2015

TAGS: [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: MALDIVES: BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON FOREIGN
MINISTER AHMED SHAHEED

REF: COLOMBO 1295

Classified By: CDA JAMES F. ENTWISTLE. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

1. (C) The July 14 appointment of Chief Government Spokesman Dr. Ahmed Shaheed as Foreign Minister (Reftel) brings to this important post a bright, western-educated technocrat friendly to the U.S. with whom the Embassy has worked closely on such key bilateral issues as democratic reform and tsunami relief. Accessible, articulate and friendly, Shaheed has proven an unstinting source of information (and, as head of President Gayoom's Strategic Communications Unit, government spin).
2. (U) Shaheed has spent most of his career in government service at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, beginning in 1982 as an attache on a two-year assignment at the Permanent Mission of Maldives to the United Nations in New York. Returning to Male', he headed the SAARC Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1996-1998 where he was responsible for preparations leading up to the SAARC Summit hosted in Male' in 1997. Following a brief stint as head of the Multilateral Affairs Division at the Ministry in 1998, Shaheed was promoted to Foreign Secretary in January 1999, a post he held until his transfer to the post of Chief Government Spokesman (with an accompanying rank of Deputy Minister) and head of the President's Strategic Communications Unit in mid-2004. In 2004 Shaheed was appointed by President Gayoom as a representative to the Special Majlis convened to consider constitutional reforms. He continues to serve in that capacity. In addition, Shaheed has served as the President's speechwriter since 1996. It is unclear if he will continue to do so.
3. (U) Shaheed attended schools in Male' and Colombo before graduating from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, with a Bachelor's degree in International Politics and Strategic Studies. He received a PhD in International Relations from the University of Queensland, Brisbane, in 1995. He is married with one son and two daughters.
4. (C) Comment: As Chief Government Spokesman, Shaheed had the unenviable task of trying to justify a number of heavy-handed Government blunders, including attempts to paint pro-reform activists as radical Islamic fundamentalists, as well as the decision to arrest Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) leaders on the very day that the People's Majlis approved, for the first time, the right of political parties to register. Despite these obvious missteps, we believe Shaheed truly appreciates the need for democratic reform, as well as the need to engage the international community in bringing them about. Savvy and urbane, he will be a welcome change from his predecessor Fathulla Jameel, an anti-reform Gayoom crony who distinguished himself last year with a vituperative, 80-minute tirade at a visiting delegation of EU Chiefs of Mission. In contrast, Shaheed epitomizes the energetic, cosmopolitan, younger-generation technocrat that Gayoom hopes to show as the new face of his Cabinet. We have a great relationship with him, on which we will continue to build.

ENTWISTLE